

Lesson 7 Formation

Acts 2.42-47

Acts 2:42 *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

- ***continued steadfastly* – Focused on Commitment**

Single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action; devoted; faithful

Persevered, adhered to

Used in 1.14 to point out their commitment to prayer

Used in 6.4 to show the Apostles' commitment to prayer and the ministry of the word

The point is that they came, they joined, and they did not leave or forsake their commitment to the fellowship of believers. There is no record of anyone leaving because they got their feelings hurt or because they did not agree with the Apostles' teaching.

- ***in the apostles' doctrine* – Focused on Commission**

"Doctrine" here does not refer to a formalized, technical, abstract collection of biblical content, but simply to teaching.

Extensive – all that Jesus said and did

Intensive – Oral, no written record

Taught the words of Jesus and the works of Jesus – ministry, miracles, passion, resurrection – and how all of these things related to Israel and to God's plan of redemption.

- ***and fellowship* – Focused on Community**

Something set these believers apart from the other Jews – *koinonia*.

Occurs 20 times in the Bible. *Koinonia*'s primary meaning is "to hold something in common."

A key aspect of the Christian life. Believers in Christ are to come together in love, faith, and encouragement. That is the essence of *koinonia*.

Philippians 2:1-2 *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.*

Koinonia is being in agreement with one another, being united in purpose, and serving alongside each other.

There's was a common faith – a hope of heaven, a hatred of sin, a habit of unity in assembly and in prayer.

Our *koinonia* with each other is based on our common *koinonia* with Jesus Christ. It is impossible for someone to be in full fellowship with Christ and fail to be in fellowship with other Christians and church members.

1 Cor. 1:9 *God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1 John 1:6-7 *If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

If we are saved, two things will be certain to follow without doubt: fellowship with other saints and forgiveness of sin. You cannot have salvation and not have fellowship any more than you can have salvation and not have forgiveness of sin. Fellowship is not a requirement of the saved, but the fruit of salvation as is forgiveness.

A powerful example of what *koinonia* should look like can be found in a study of the phrase “one another” in the Bible. It is used 39 times in the NT and carries with it the meaning of reciprocation between two things that are alike.

- ***in the breaking of bread – Focused on Communion***

Could refer to communion and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper or it could refer to common meals shared in fellowship with each other.

Luke 21.19 Jesus broke bread at the last supper.

Luke 24.30 Jesus broke bread at a regular meal.

Placement in a list of spiritually related items makes us think that it probably refers to the breaking of bread in ceremony – the remembrance of the One who made all of this possible – Christ. They were continually reminding themselves and each other of the power behind their privilege to be part of the family of God.

May have been a custom at the end of a meal or a feast of some kind. It began as a form of worship, but the meaning seems to have become lost in tradition until Paul had to come down hard on the Corinthians for making the feast an embarrassing testimony to their gluttony and self-centeredness.

For the first church, the members knew little of “church” in the sense of an organized body and sought only to know more about Christ, which they learned through the teaching of the apostles.

It was His grace and sacrifice and salvation that they all shared in common and they did not “forsake the assembling of themselves together.”

And when they did come together, they “broke bread” – the symbol of which is to remind them and us of the presence of Christ in their hearts as well as in the assembly.

- ***and in prayers – Focused on Communication***

At the beginning, these were probably recitations of formal prayers learned from childhood in the Jewish tradition. Again, it is important to remember that the church has not seen itself as something separate from Israel.

Whatever the form their prayers took, the important thing is that they recognized that there could be no church – no fellowship of believers united in common purpose and praise – that was not bathed in prayer.

At the beginning of the verse, there was a lot of listening going on – at the end, there was a lot of talking. But this talk was directed, not at each other or about one another, but toward God who controls heaven and earth as well as the destiny of souls and His church.

Acts 2:43 *And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.*

- **Fear**

“Every soul” seems to indicate that the commitment of those in the fellowship had a direct bearing on the attitude of those in the community who were not part of the fellowship.

The sense of the word “came” is that this awe and fear “kept on coming.” In other words, every day brought new testimonies of how God was working in the lives of this assembly of believers.

The multitude who had so recently poked fun at the first disciples and reviled these “early morning drunks” now stood in awe and reverence, subdued and silenced by the change that they witnessed in the lives of those who believed.

- **Fascination**

Here were seemingly ordinary men – previously fishermen and tax collectors and rebels – all performing similar wonders and signs that these same people had seen performed by Jesus.

Ada Habershon (*from England, 19th Century; to US to work w/ Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey; wrote about 200 hymns, but known “Will the Circle Be Unbroken.”*)

God’s reasons for working miracles:

- He had lessons to impart which could not otherwise be taught.
- He had purposes to fulfil which could not otherwise be accomplished.
- He had revelations to make which could not otherwise be made clear.

Sometimes He worked to prove His omnipotence, His omniscience, His omnipresence; at other times He wished to reveal that He Himself was working.

No miracle was worked and no record was given without a definite purpose....But there was a reason for the working of the miracles of the ministry which surpassed all others. The Lord had come to reveal a God of infinite love and compassion....The miracles recorded in the Gospels were not mere exhibitions of power – they were revelations of grace.

Here is God, affirming His word and confirming His lordship and approving of these who made up the early church – the body of Christ now in a form that could penetrate the darkness all the way to the ends of the earth.

Acts 2:44 *And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.*
45 *They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.*

The believers experienced and practiced community not communism.

- **Community in profession ...all the believers** – The early church was made up of believers – those who knew Christ as Savior. These were Jews who had come to realize the fulfillment of all of the OT in the person of Jesus, the Christ. The scoffers were all gone – at least for the time being – and the church was in one accord – at least for the time being.
- **Community in passion ...met together in one place** – They did not all live together in a common place – there were too many for that – but they shared a common passion. They were unified in purpose, in praise, and in prayer, which caused them to have a strong desire to meet in one place to share the experience of knowing and living Christ.

It's especially important that we read the first part of that verse again...

...all the believers met together in one place... They realized that spiritual growth of the Christian requires fellowship of the entire body **together** and in **one place**. They did not believe that they could worship equally as well by themselves fishing down by the Jordan River.

Verse 46 says that they met every day in the Temple. Could it be that the one thing that convinced the nay-sayers to become quiet in their criticism and to wonder in awe of the transformation of these believers was the faithfulness in attendance of those who professed Christ as Savior?

- **Community in practice ...and shared everything they had** – There was no demand on any member to divest themselves of all property, but there was a desire in their hearts – a willingness to contribute everything possible to the welfare of those within the fellowship who could not care for themselves or who struggled financially.

Acts 2:46 *And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47a Praising God, and having favor with all the people.*

- **Community in purpose ...continuing daily with one accord in the temple...**

All of the converts to date were either Jews or proselytes.

They were still Jews, but they were Christians. They were Christians, but they were still Jews. They still met in the Temple on a daily basis and practiced Jewish customs, beliefs, and prayers.

Jerusalem was still their city; the Temple was still their sanctuary; the Law was still their Law.

They were Hebrews, but they have finally gotten things right concerning the Messiah. They have seen the fulfillment of all that Israel had hoped for.

There was no plan at this point to break with the Jews

So, they continued to meet in the place that, for them, had always represented the presence of God and holiness – the Temple.

- **Community in partaking ...*breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,*...**

They met daily in the Temple – at least at this point in time. Yet a singular feature of their fellowship was that they also frequented one another's homes and while it says they broke bread together, the sense here is that they shared meals together more than shared communion in a spiritual sense.

And they did so with "singleness of heart." The most common translation of this phrase in more contemporary translations is "simplicity" or "with generosity."

The word is a compound word. The "a" at the beginning means "not" or "without."

The second part of the word refers to a stone that causes one to stubb their toe.

So in combination, the word signifies a smooth, plain land without any rocks that mar the surface or soil so that the pathway is easy to walk.

- **Community in praise 47a *Praising God...***

Structurally, the first part of verse 47 is connected more to verse 46.

They were a community of praise – focused upward and inward (vertical).

They were aware that the salvation they had experienced was a deliverance from the captivity of sin and that the only reason they were justified in God's eyes was the direct result of grace.

- **Community in persistence 47a *...and having favor with all the people...***

Maybe a better word would be consistency – they were not hypocritical in their walk before the people of the world.

Not only was there a vertical focus evident in the church, but there was also a horizontal focus – outward toward the community.

The community may not have joined them, but their testimony in the community was of a people who loved their God and worshiped Him in unity. As a result, every translation says that the next phrase means that the church met with feelings of goodwill from all of the community.

But one commentator made a good point. When you read back over all of the verses in this set of verses, all of the verbs are active voice: *continuing, breaking bread, praying, believing, selling, parting, partaking, and praising.*

So why would this phrase suddenly jump to the passive voice – *having favor*?

In the Greek, the verb translated as "having" is actually a present participle in active voice, as are the other verbs I pointed out.

In addition, the word translated as "favor" in the KJV is the Greek word *charis*, which means "grace."

So, putting all of that together, then an acceptable translation of that last phrase could be "...having charity toward all the people..."

A similar statement is made concerning Jesus in...

Luke 2:52 *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.*

Yet here again, we need to study the context to get the full meaning of this verse. Remember that the 12-year-old Jesus had become separated from his parents, causing them much concern until they found him in the Temple.

When they confronted him about his behavior, remember his answer...

Luke 2:49 *And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*

And what was His Father's business? Sharing the Gospel with the world – telling the good news of salvation.

Could it be that the church found favor with the community was because after the church testified about the love and joy found in Christ to the community, then the community was able to witness the truth of that profession in the actions of the members towards one another?

Acts 2:47b *And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

This is evidence of the above argument that the last phrase is more than just a statement of how much the community appreciated the church – it is a statement of the outward focus of the church than toward the community in an evangelistic way.

This last phrase is simply a statement of fact that the church continued to grow as new people were saved.

ESV – *And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

HCSB – *And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.*

Msg – *Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.*

NKJV – *And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

There are two points to make here:

1. ***The Lord added to the church...***

Remember that Jesus told His disciples that, upon their profession of faith in Him as Lord, He would build His church. The only person who can build a church is Jesus. We do not have the power to save. We can only make the decision to be obedient to share our testimony with the world around us and trust God to build His church.

2. ***Those who were being saved...***

Those who were being saved were being added to the church. That means that those who were being saved recognized that their call was not just to salvation – to

forgiveness of sin and rescue from hell – but to become part of the body of Christ by attaching themselves to the local body of believers.

Those who claim to know Christ as Lord will, by default, associate themselves with His church. How can anyone claim to be a Christian – a part of the body of Christ – and then not associate with the other cells?

New body cells become part of the human body – not spiritually, but physically – not because they make a decision to join the body, but because that is what defines them as human body cells. If they can live outside of the human body, then they must not be human cells.

The same thing is true of those who claim to be Christian and seldom or never darken the doors of a local church.

So we come to the end of Acts 2.

Here was God bringing into reality the power of Christ, the prophecy of Joel, and the preaching of Peter.

Joel's prophecy came at a time following one of the greatest economic catastrophes in all of the history of Israel and preceded one of the greatest political and historical tragedies the nation would ever know – destruction of the nation by Jerusalem and being carried off into captivity.

Little did Israel know that they were witnessing the repeat of history during these days. Joel had said, ***“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered.”***

Peter echoed that very same message in his timely sermon to the nation in Acts 2. The people were struggling under the heavy yoke of the Romans, but little did they realize that they were less than 30 years from total annihilation.

It should be the message of the church today. Our nation is in the midst of one of the worst economic and political challenges it has ever faced since the Civil War. Are these days just the precursors to God's wrath on this country and this world.

“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

That may sound like an all-inclusive, open-armed invitation. I believe it is more accurately a prophecy of how few will actually listen. The testimony of history is that most will ignore the warning. Even Jesus said, ***“The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”***

That does not excuse the church from its duty to share the Gospel with every person we meet. It is a reminder that ultimately, salvation is between each individual and the Creator.